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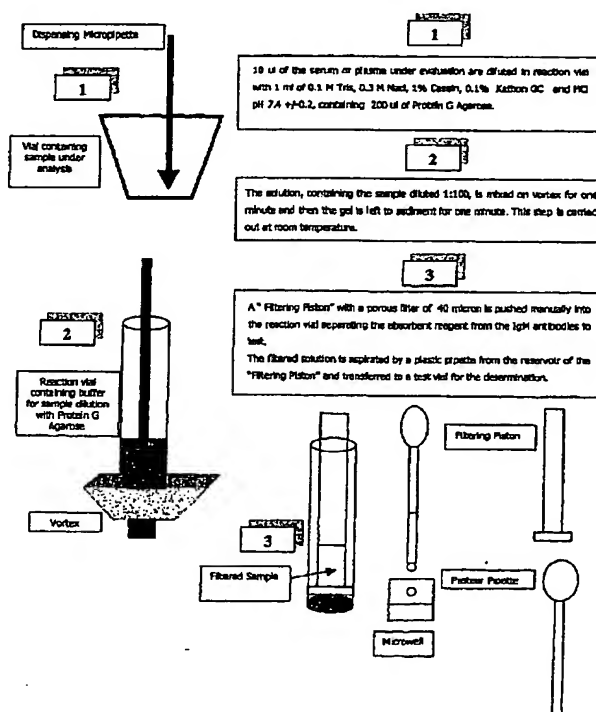
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(54) Elisa confirmation test for early primary cytomegalovirus infection

(57) The invention relates to an Enzyme Linked ImmunoSorbent Assay (ELISA) which permits the characterization of a primary infection caused by Cytomegalo-

virus, by means of the determination of Class Igm antibodies specific to some well known Cytomegalovirus immunodominant synthetic peptides adsorbed on the micro-wells surfaces of a test-module polystyrene strip.

- DRAWING N°1 -
Operative procedure to remove the potential
interference due to class G antibodies and
Rheumatoid factor (RF)



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Description

[0001] This invention relates to a method for the antigenic characterization of a primary infection due to Cytomegalovirus (CMV).

5 [0002] Human Cytomegalovirus belongs to the Herpesviridae family and its infection spread from human to human through contaminated blood and body fluids such as urine, saliva, semen, breast milk and cervical secretions.

[0003] The class IgM antibodies detection is currently a powerful diagnostic tool for monitoring pregnant women and risky patients (mainly transplanted and AIDS patients), exposed to CMV infection.

10 [0004] A CMV acute primary infection represents an important cause of risk of fetus abnormalities and death for immune compromised and immune suppressed patients.

[0005] Even if the current immunodiagnostic assays have increased the chances of a faster and more accurate diagnosis of CMV infection, the medical literature points out some important problems regarding the determination of IgM antibodies produced by the infected organism against CMV in the first steps of the primary infection or in the reactivation of a chronic infection.

15 [0006] On account of the high variability of antigens expressed during the CMV life cycle and to the complexity of the immune response developed by the patient, discrepancies in results coming from different laboratory tests is often observed mainly due to the high variance in the quality of the test used or the analytical methodology applied.

[0007] Discrepancy may lead to wrong and harmful evaluations of the clinical status of the patient under monitoring and to the risk of serious mistakes in selecting the best pharmacological therapy.

20 [0008] The immunoenzymatic has been developed aimed at:

1. Confirming the diagnosis of CMV primary infection when in presence of the above mentioned discrepancies in the diagnostic test results or in case of border line results, difficult to be interpreted.

2. Supplying more reliable results in case of "difficult" samples coming from risk patients.

25 3. Providing a wider view on the clinical situation of the patient and about the infection progressive developing.

Principle of the assay

[0009] The CMV confirmation kit is based on an ELISA microplate made of 12 strip modules.

30 [0010] Each strip-module is composed of 8 reaction microwells and is dedicated to test one sample (mainly serum or plasma).

[0011] Each microwell, the strip-module is composed of, is coated with one or more synthetic antigens bearing CMV specific sequences. These are derived from conserved and immunodominant epitopes coming from CMV antigens showing an important role under an immune and diagnostic point of view.

35 [0012] The microwells of the strip-module are coated with antigens according to the following scheme :

Position	Protein	Function
A	Casein	Negative Control
B	IgG Anti hIgM	Positive Control
C	UL 32 or Phosphoprotein 150 region 1	IgM test
D	UL 32 or Phosphoprotein 150 region 2	IgM test
E	UL 100 or Glicoprotein M	IgM test
F	UL 44 or Phosphoprotein 52	IgM test
G	UL 99 or Phosphoprotein 28	IgM test
H	Phosphoprotein 67	IgM test

[0013] The scheme, the test is based on, derives from the well-known RIBA and Western-Blot assay where native antigens, bound on a nylon or nitrocellulose support, give a deep view about the immune reactivity status of the patients.

[0014] The sample (mainly serum or plasma) is treated with an Immunsorbent (Protein G Agarose) able to bind and remove possible interferences due to IgG class antibodies or to the Rheumatoid Factor (RF).

5 [0015] The sample treated with the Immunsorbent reagent is dispensed in each microwell of the Strip-Module.

[0016] During the first incubation of the assay, IgM antibodies, if present in the sample, are specifically captured by synthetic antigens coated on the microwell.

[0017] After washing out not specific antibodies, anti CMV IgM antibodies are detected by the addition of a polyclonal antibody, IgM specific, affinity purified and conjugated to horseradish peroxidase (HRP).

10 [0018] After washing to remove the unbound tracer, each microwell is dispensed with a solution composed by a substrate and a chromogenic molecule which due to its reaction with the enzyme (HRP) develops an optical signal, directly proportional to the quantity of IgM specifically bound to CMV antigens.

[0019] The optical signal is read by a spectrophotometer at a specific wave length (450 - 650 nm) and results elaborated by a dedicated software.

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Main features of the invention

[0020] The invention is related to an Immunoenzymatic (ELISA) assay for the analysis of the immune status produced upon a CMV primary infection or reactivation by determining the IgM class antibodies specific to some CMV immunodominant and conserved antigens, absorbed on a micro well titer plate.

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[0021] The present invention can ease the physicians to define, with a high degree of confidence, an active CMV infection or a reactivation, through the characterization of the IgM antibody response.

[0022] This invention can moreover help the physician to make a diagnosis of CMV infection and to define a therapy against it in an easier, more reliable and faster way.

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1. Characterization and choice of the polypeptide sequences

[0023] The choice of the synthetic peptides to activate the wells of the strip-module has been done on the basis of these technical reasons :

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1. Synthetic peptides represent an antigenic reagent of high specificity;
2. Synthetic peptides are produced with reliable technical procedures and with an high degree of lot-to-lot homogeneity;
3. Synthetic peptide, when correctly selected, can bear highly immunogenic sequences of CMV antigens, coming from important epitopes against which the specific immune response is directed;
- 35 4. Synthetic peptides let overcome problems due to the use of antigenic preparations of CMV obtained from in vitro tissue culture systems, usually composed by host cells of human origin, that could be contaminated by human proteins
- 40 5. Synthetic peptides let overcome problems of crossreactions with other viruses of the family of Herpesviridae (HSV, EBV) by selecting CMV specific sequences.

[0024] Each synthetic peptide, present in this assay, represents unequivocally a CMV specific sequence derived from CMV antigens expressed during the early steps of virus replication and known to be stimulating the production of IgM antibodies.

45

[0025] A deep study has been conducted in the scientific literature to identify the presence of protein with amino acidic sequences well identified and characterized to be clinically and immunologically relevant in the CMV infection.

[0026] We have identified and selected a list of scientific publications from which we have extracted information about CMV proteins structure and immunogenicity useful for the development of the assay, as follows :

50

1. K. S. Kim, V.J. Saplenza, R.I. Carp and H.M. Moon

Analysis and structural polypeptides of purified human cytomegalovirus.

Journal of Virology, Dec. 1976, p. 604-611

2. N.E. Cremer, C.K. Cossen, G.R. Shell and L. Pereira

Antibody response to cytomegalovirus polypeptides captured by monoclonal antibodies on solid phase in enzyme immunoassay.

55

Journal of Clinical Microbiology, Apr. 1985, p. 517-521

3. M.P. Landini and M. La Placa

Humoral immune response to human cytomegalovirus proteins : a brief review.

Comp. Immun. Microbiol. Infect. Dis. Vol.14, n°2, p97-105, 1991

[0027] In these publications we identified the CMV specific proteins of major interest under a diagnostic point of view, suitable for the determination of the IgM class antibodies during a primary CMV infection or reactivation, as follows :

1. Phosphoprotein pp150 o UL 32
2. Glycoprotein M o UL 100
3. Phosphoprotein pp52 o UL 44
4. Phosphoprotein pp28 o UL 99
5. Phosphoprotein pp67

[0028] The bibliographic documentation specific on Immunodominant antigens was obtained from the following scientific publications:

1. **pp150**
G. Jahn et al. Journal of Virology 1988, 62:
p. 2243- 2250
2. **gp M**
B. Kari et al. Journal of General Virology 1994, 75: p.3081-3086
3. **pp 52**
Leach F.S., Mocarsky E.S. J.Virol. 63: 1783-1791 (1989)
4. **pp 28**
H.Meyer et al. Journal of Virology 1988, 62: p. 2243-2250
5. **pp 67**
M. G. Davis et al. Journal of Virology 1985, 56: p.7-11

[0029] Each antigen, identified as a potential reactive agent for the solid phase represented by wells of the microplate, has been studied for the immunological characteristics of its aminoacidic sequence, analyzing it with Informatics tools as the programs "Geneworks" and "Peptide Companion", or on the basis of the data found in the publications mentioned above.

[0030] Identified the most interesting sequences, we have proceeded to synthesize them by a fully automated peptide synthesizer, by means of "F-Moc" or "T-Boc" solid phase chemistry and to peptides purification by "reverse phase" HPLC procedure.

[0031] Each peptide has been analyzed and characterized by a panel of well-defined CMV IgM positive samples, pre-tested in a Elisa systems for CMV IgM detection (Abbott and Dia.Pro code CMVM2).

[0032] Results have lead to the identification of the sequences used in our Immunoenzymatic system, enumerated as follows in succession:

Antigen pp 150

1) Sequence pp150-1 AA 1011-1048

KSGTGPPQGSAGMGGAKTPSDAVQNILQKIEKIKNTEE -cooh

2) Sequence pp150-2 AA 594-633

LTPTPVNPSTAPAPAPTPTFAGTQTPVNGNSPWAPTAPLP -cooh

Antigen gp M

5

1) Sequence gpM-1 AA 1-13

10

MAPSHDKVNTRTW-cooh

2) Sequence gpM-2 AA 292-311

15

ASGEEVAVLSHHDSLESRRRL- cooh

Antigen CMV pp52

20

1) Sequence pp 52 AA 397-432

25

LDRNSGNYFNDAKEESSEDSVTFFVPNTKKQKC-cooh

30

Antigen CMV pp 28

35

1) Sequence pp28 AA 7-31

EFGTTPGEPLKDALGRQVSLRSYDN-cooh

40

Antigen CMV pp67

45

1) Sequence pp 67-1 AA 82-106

PSLSEKKTASPTCVKHHLSGGAVRR-cooh

50

2) Sequence pp 67-2 AA 38-62

55

GRSRPTTFHLTRKKKAPLGGDLSPS-cooh

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[0033] The amino acids are identified in the list by an international single letter code according to the following reading key:

A = Alanine, R = Arginine, N = Asparagine, D = Aspartic acid, C = Cysteine, Q = Glutamine, E = Glutamic acid, G = Glycine, H = Histidine, I = Isoleucine, L = Leucine, K = lysine, M = methionine, F = Phenylalanine, P = Proline, S = Serine, T = Threonine, W = Tryptophan, Y = Tyrosine, V = Valine

2. Micro plate activation procedure

[0034] A 96 microwells polystyrene titer plate, composed by 12 strips-modules each made by 8 wells, is used for the assay.

[0035] Each strip is considered as a test module useful to carry out the analysis of one sample.

[0036] Each well in a strip-module is coated with one or more synthetic antigens in a concentration determined through a series of previous analysis.

[0037] Antigens coated according to the following scheme, considering to start from the first well on the upper side down to the lower side of the strip module:

A.	casein used as negative control in the system		
B.	Policlonal antibody to human IgM used as positive control in the system		
C.	Phosphoproteine 150	1 [^] sequence	IgM test
D.	Phosphoproteine 150	2 [^] sequence	IgM test
E.	Glycoprotein M	1 [^] & 2 [^] sequences	IgM test
F.	Phosphoproteine 52		IgM test
G.	Phosphoproteine 28		IgM test
H.	Phosphoproteine 67	1 [^] & 2 [^] sequences	IgM test

[0038] The synthetic antigens are diluted to the chosen concentration in a 10mM Na-carbonate buffer, adjusting the pH to 9.4 +/-0.2 using Na-bicarbonate and then antigens are dispensed into the proper well.

[0039] The microplate, after an overnight incubation at +37 °C are washed with a 0.1% solution of Tween 20 in water and then incubated for 4 hour at room temperature (20-25° C) with 200 ul of an overcoating solution composed of 0.2 M Tris base, 2% idiolized Casein and HCl to pH of 7.6 +/-0.2.

[0040] After the last incubation, the solution present in the microwell is aspirated, the solid phase is dried and finally sealed into an aluminum bag with a desiccant material.

3. Method for the elimination of the interference caused by IgG antibodies and Rheumatoid Factor (RF)

[0041] In order to get reliable results, the role of a procedure for the elimination of the false reactivity from the system by using an absorbing reagent (Protein G Agarose) is essential. This step is used in the assay to capture the class IgG immunoglobulin present in serum and plasma, avoiding the possibility of their interference in the test.

[0042] The method of sample treatment has been optimized by a filtrating unit, proceeding as described in the following scheme:

1. Serum or plasma is diluted in a protein buffered solution together with the adsorbent reagent for a fixed time, defined previously, under stirring;
2. Separation of Protein G Agarose from the suspension is then achieved by pushing it through a "Filtering Piston" able to release only the liquid part of the suspension, containing the IgM to be tested;
3. IgM to be examined for anti CMV reactivity are then recovered in the upper reservoir of the "Filtering Piston", sipped out with a pipette and then transferred into a test vial.

[0043] The protein G Agarose used in the system has the following characteristics:

1. It is conjugated with spherical microparticles of agarose with a diameter comprised from 45 to 165 um (Micrometer);
2. It is activated with approximately 2 milligrams (mg) of protein G per ml (milliliter) of the gel;
3. It has a binding capacity of about 20 mg (milligrams) of class IgG antibodies per ml of gel.

[0044] The procedure for the elimination of the interfering substances from the samples is then achieved by the

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following steps:

1. 10 μ l of the serum or plasma under evaluation are diluted in reaction vial with 1 ml of 0.1 M Tris, 0.3 M NaCl, 1% Casein, 0.1% Kathon GC and HCl pH 7.4 \pm 0.2, containing 200 μ l of Protein G Agarose.
2. The suspension, containing the sample diluted 1:100, is mixed on vortex for one minute and then the gel is left to sediment for one minute. This step is carried out at room temperature.
3. A "Filtering Piston" with a porous filter of about 40 micron is pushed manually into the reaction vial separating the absorbent reagent from the IgM antibodies to test.
4. The filtrated solution is aspirated by a plastic pipette from the reservoir of the "Filtering Piston" and transferred to a test vial for the determination.

4. Neutralizing reagent

[0045] Aimed at obtaining the highest rate in the elimination of interferences by IgG Antibodies or Rheumatoid Factor (RF), a second procedure was further introduced in the assay, based on the use of a reagent specific for their neutralization. The neutralizing reagent is dispensed in the microwells of the strip-module before dispensing the sample of serum or plasma under evaluation.

[0046] The formulation of the neutralizing reagent is the following:

diNa -Phosphate dodecahydrate	0.01 M
NaCl	0.15 M
Antiserum anti hFc IgG	30 %
o-Phosphoric acid to pH 7.4 \pm 0.2	

[0047] The Neutralizing reaction is carried by adding 50 μ l of Neutralizing Reagent into each well of a module, just before adding 50 μ l of the sample previously treated with protein G Agarose.

[0048] The time sequence of the adding is strategic for the right execution of the test procedures as, if the neutralizing reagent is added after the sample, it could not inactivate any interfering IgG, eventually escaped from the Immunoabsorption procedure.

5. Test procedure

[0049] After treating the serum or plasma with the Immunoabsorbent Reagent followed by the addition of the Neutralizing Reagent, 50 μ l of the sample is added to each well of the strip-module.

[0050] The module is then incubated for 45 minutes in a ELISA thermostatic incubator at the controlled temperature of $+37^{\circ}\text{C} \pm 1$.

[0051] At the end of the incubation, the strip-module is washed for 5 times with 300 μ l of washing buffer, previously diluted 1:20 with ELISA grade water, by means of an automatic washer.

[0052] The washing buffer, 20X concentrated, has the following composition:

Na-Phosphate, bibasic	10 mM
NaCl	0.15 M
Tween 20	0.05%
Kathon GC	0.1%
HCl to pH 7.4 \pm 0.2	

[0053] In each well of the strip-module 100 μ l of an enzymatic tracer composed of a polyclonal antibody specific to human IgM, purified by affinity chromatography and labeled with Horseradish peroxidase (HRP).

[0054] The enzyme conjugate, supplied 20X concentrated and titrated to provide the best performances, is diluted few minutes before in a buffer containing 0.1 M Tris-base, 2% Bovin Albumin, 0.1% Kathon GC, 2 mg/ml Gentamycine sulphate, and Citric Acid to pH 6.5 \pm 0.1.

[0055] The strip-module is then incubated at 37°C for 45 minutes.

[0056] When the second incubation is over, the module is washed as previously described.

[0057] Then 100 μ l of a stabilized solution of a chromogen (tetramethylbenzidine or TMB) and a substrate (hydrogen peroxide or H_2O_2), supplied ready to use, are dispensed in all the wells of the strip-module.

[0058] The enzymatic tracer bound to the IgM, captured specifically on the microwells, by reacting with the chro-

mogen/substrate solution develops a color whose intensity is proportional to the quantity of CMV specific IgM present in the sample.

[0059] The enzymatic reaction is stopped after an incubation of 15 minutes in the dark at room temperature by the addition of 100 μ l of 0.3 M sulphuric acid in all the wells of the strip-module.

[0060] The absorbance of the colored solution generated by the enzymatic reaction is read with spectrophotometer at 450 nm (reading filter) and possibly at 640-650 nm (blank filter) in order to subtract any false absorbance due to finger prints and dust, eventually present on the plastic.

6. Interpretation of results

[0061] The optical densities coming from the photometric readings, subtracted of the 654-650nm values, are considered valid if they match the following parameters :

1. OD 450nm value of the "A" well less than 0,300.
2. OD 450nm value of the "B" well higher than 1,500.

[0062] If the validity of the test is confirmed, results from the other wells of the strip-module can be interpreted according to the following scheme:

1. Negative result: If wells "C,D,E,F,G,H" show OD values lower than the OD450nm of "A" + 0,250
2. Equivocal result: If the OD450nm of well "A" is higher than 0,300.
3. Positive result: If at least one well out of "C,D,E,F,G,H" shows an OD value higher than the OD450nm of "A" + 0,250

Claims

1. A process for the determination of IgM class antibodies, produced by the immune system of a patient during Cytomegalovirus primary infection or its reactivation, in human biological fluids by means of an Enzyme Linked ImmunoSorbent Assay or ELISA;
2. A process according to Claim 1 which makes use of a test-module made of a polystyrene ELISA microplate strip, as solid phase. The strip is composed of 8 flat bottom wells and the module is sufficient for the analysis of one sample ;
3. A process according to Claim 2 wherein twelve test-modules are supplied firmly hold into a ELISA microplate ;
4. A process according to Claim 1 which is based on a test-module whose wells are singularly activated with different synthetic peptides, able to provide internal assay controls (negative and positive) and CMV specific IgM determinations ;
5. A process according to Claim 4 wherein synthetic peptides, bearing CMV specific, immunodominant and conservative epitopes derived from well-characterized CMV antigens expressed during the first phase of the CMV infection ;
6. A process according to Claim 1 which makes use as CMV specific synthetic peptides of the following sequences:

Phosphoprotein 150 (pp150)

5 1^sequence aa 1011-1048
KSGTGPPQPGSAGMGGAKTPSDAVQNILQKIEKIKNTEE-cooh
10 2^sequence aa 594-633
LTPTPVNPSTAPAPAPTPTFAGTQTPVNGNSPWAPTAPLP-cooh

15

Glicoprotein M (gpM)

1^sequence aa 1-14
20 MAPSHDKVNTRTW-cooh
2^sequence aa 292-311
25 ASGEEVAVLSHHDSLESRRL- cooh

30

Phosphoprotein 52 (pp52)

sequence aa 397-432
35 LDRNSGNYFNDAKEESDSVTFEFVPNTKKQKC-cooh

40

Phosphoprotein 28 (pp28)

sequence aa 7-31
45 EFGTTPGEPLKDALGRQVSLRSYDN-cooh

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Phosphoprotein 67 (pp67)1[^]sequence aa 82-106

PSLSEKKTASPTCVKHHLSGGAVRR-cooh

2[^]sequence aa 38-62

GRSRPTTFHLTRKKKAPLGGDLSPS-cooh

7. A process according to Claim 1 wherein the micro-wells of the test-module are activated according to the following scheme:

Position	Protein	Function
A	Casein	Negative Control
B	IgG Anti hIgM	Positive Control
C	UL 32 or Phosphoprotein 150 region 1	IgM test
D	UL 32 or Phosphoprotein 150 region 2	IgM test
E	UL 100 or Glicoprotein M	IgM test
F	UL 44 or Phosphoprotein 52	IgM test
G	UL 99 or Phosphoprotein 28	IgM test
H	Phosphoprotein 67	IgM test

8. A process according to Claim 1 which includes a step of sample pre treatment by means of Protein G Agarose (Enclosed n° 1) during anti CMV IgG antibodies (which can give false reactions mostly in combination with the rheumatoid factor) are captured by the adsorbent and removed from the sample ;

9. A process according to Claim 1 wherein the removal of Interfering class IgG antibodies is carried out through the following procedure and materials (Figure n° 1):

a. 10 ul of biological fluid under analysis (mainly serum or plasma) are added to a reaction vial containing 1 ml (milliliter) of 0.1 M Tris base, 0.3 M NaCl, 1% Casein, 0.1% Kathon GC and HCl to pH 7.4, in which 200 ul of 0.5 mg/ml Protein G Agarose have been previously added. The suspension, in which the sample has been diluted to the final dilution of 1:100, is mixed on vortex for at least one minute. The suspension is left to sediment for one minute at room temperature (20-25°C).

b. A filtering piston with a filter with 40 micrometers sized pores is pushed with a finger tip pressure into the reaction vial separating the adsorbent reagent (Protein G Agarose) to the bottom of the vial from the aqueous solution containing the IgM to test, collected in the reservoir of the filtering piston.

c. The filtered solution collected in the reservoir is aspirated by a plastic pipette and transferred to a new vial waiting the determination.

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10. A process according to Claim 1 which uses a neutralizing reagent which removes any residual presence of interfering class IgG antibodies, eventually remained in the solution despite the treatment with Protein G Agarose. This step is carried out by adding 50 μ l of the neutralizing reagent directly in the microwells of the reaction strip-module just before the addition of the sample, diluted and pre-treated as described to avoid interferences due to the class IgG antibodies (before they could react with the peptides on the solid phase);

11. A process according to Claim 1 wherein the neutralizing reagent has the following formula :

dNa-Phosphate dodecalhydrate	0.01M
NaCl	0.15M
Anti hIgG-Fc specific antiserum	30%
HCl to pH 7.4 \pm 0.1	

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- DRAWING N°1 -
Operative procedure to remove the potential
interference due to class G antibodies and
Rheumatoid factor (RF)

